

DECLARATION OF DEANNE GILLIAM

I, Deanne Gilliam, am over 18 years of age and am competent to testify. I declare as follows:

1. I am a resident of Baltimore, Maryland.
2. I live with my husband, son, daughter, and 9 year-old granddaughter, of whom I have full custody.
3. Starting in approximately December 2019, I worked as a case manager at Innovative Housing helping people with disabilities access Section 8 housing.
4. In February 2021, my employment was terminated. My boss did not give me any reason for the termination.
5. On or around February 24, 2021, I applied for unemployment benefits with the Maryland Department of Labor (MDL) using the BEACON portal.
6. It was not easy for me to use BEACON because I do not have regular access to a computer. I can access BEACON through a mobile app on my phone, but the app does not allow me to view all correspondence or action items that show up on the web version.
7. Shortly after applying, but I received a \$1000 check in the mail from the Comptroller of Maryland. I was later told that this was a payment made to people waiting for unemployment benefits, but that it was not itself an unemployment benefit payment.
8. At the end of February 2021, MDL issued a "statement of wages and monetary eligibility" which said I was eligible for \$430/month in Regular UI benefits. I did not see this correspondence until November 15, 2021. Finding correspondence in BEACON is not intuitive for me. In any event, I did not begin receiving any payments after the date of the "statement of wages and monetary eligibility."

9. In early March 2021, I was suddenly locked out of my BEACON account without any explanation of why. If I tried to log in using the username and password I had created, I would eventually get an email saying that my account “will be locked for 30 minutes from the last unsuccessful attempt to log in.” If I waited 30 minutes or even a few hours and then tried to log in, I would still be locked out.

10. I called MDL and complained that BEACON had locked me out. An agent told me that they would look into why this was but, in the meantime, I could file weekly certifications for benefits by phone while I was waiting for a final determination of my eligibility.

11. I called every week from March 10 through May 2 to file my certification. If I ever called after 9 AM to file, I would end up on hold for hours. On at least one occasion when this happened, I tried contacting MDL through its online chat function to ask for help filing my weekly certification. The agent responding to my chat said that my only option was to file by phone; this meant I had to continue to wait on hold indefinitely.

12. On May 10, when I called MDL to file my weekly certification, the agent I spoke with told me to stop calling because my claim was “waiting adjudication.” He said that “adjudication” would contact me.

13. After May 10, I emailed MDL every few days to ask about the status of my application for benefits. I was repeatedly told that my application was still “in adjudication” and that I had to keep waiting.

14. On July 21, 2021, about five months after I first applied and four months after I was locked out, I received an email from “Alex” at MDL who said that he had been assigned as my case manager and was “here to help you through this process and move your case to a resolution.”

15. Alex emailed me later that day to say “your payments are on hold due to the eligibility issues you have. I have submitted this information to our team for review. We will be working to get an unemployment insurance professional assigned to your case who specializes in interviews.” He did not explain what the “eligibility issues” were. He also didn’t say anything about fixing my lock out issue.

16. Alex’s second email also stated that “we will need you to complete the action item in your beacon portal to upload your personal identification information.” He forwarded information saying that identification documents must be “Legible (not blurry),” “Provided in color,” show “All four corners of the document,” and “Signed” and “Should not be scanned or laminated.” I could not see any action item nor could I upload the documents because my BEACON account was still frozen. I emailed Alex the identification documents since I could not upload them.

17. I also repeatedly called MDL about unfreezing access to my BEACON account. I eventually received an appointment to visit MDL on August 3 to address this issue.

18. On August 3, I attended my appointment at MDL’s offices on Eutaw Street in Baltimore. At the appointment, I spoke via videochat with an MDL representative who said that the agency had locked my account because of suspected fraud. The representative said that she would unlock the account and give me a questionnaire to complete if I provided my license and passport to a woman named Ms. Sarah in the office for copying. I provided the documents to Ms. Sarah. Afterwards, I spoke with another MDL representative in the office – whose name I do not recall – who said that she planned to call my former employer to gather information needed to resolve my claim and promised to call me that evening or the next day.

19. I was still locked out of my account and had not received a call from anyone at MDL as

of late in the afternoon of August 4, so I used MDL's chat function on its website to follow up. I explained what had happened at the August 3 appointment and confirmed that I had given my identity documents to Ms. Sarah. The representative responding to my chat said "perfect, ok she did resolve the issue in regards to your proof of identity investigation but you have a different issue pending in your account." This was very frustrating to me. I had applied for benefits in February, been locked out since March, and worked tirelessly to try to get my benefits. Then when one issue was apparently finally resolved, they found another issue. And all that time I still could not access my account and wouldn't have even known that MDL found another issue without contacting some agent on a "chat."

20. The MDL representative further explained in our chat that there were two pending issues with my account – one related to my separation from my employer and one related to vacation/holiday pay – and that this "is why the hold has not been lifted." The representative said that I needed to complete a questionnaire in order to resolve those issues. I asked her if she could help me access my BEACON account, explaining that if I could not access it, I could not complete the paperwork. The representative did not unlock my account. Instead, she said "I will submit a ticket to the proper department to notify them of this issue." I still could not access my account and could not respond to the new issues raised.

21. On August 19, Alex from MDL emailed me to tell me to file my weekly certifications if I was still in need of benefits. I responded to tell him that my account was still locked.

22. Also on August 19, I contacted MDL via the online chat function for help unlocking my BEACON account. An agency representative advised me to complete and submit an online form to unlock BEACON. However, the form could be submitted only through BEACON itself, so I was unable to submit it. I don't know how they expect people who are locked out to submit a

form through a portal they are locked out of, so this response was also quite disappointing. The representative could not help but scheduled me for yet another appointment at MDL's office; the appointment was scheduled for eight weeks later, on October 22.

23. I continued to wait and hope the situation would get fixed as the weeks went on. I couldn't believe it would take six months to get benefits, not to mention all the headaches and stress of trying to get someone at MDL to help. On top of all this were other personal struggles, including losing my niece to COVID-19.

24. On October 22, I arrived at 7:45 AM for my 8:30 AM appointment with MDL. There were already about 20 people in line waiting for assistance when I arrived.

25. I met with an MDL representative whose name sounded like Santisha. About 10 minutes into my meeting, another MDL representative came in and said that my 30-minute slot was up. When I explained that I had only been there for about 10 minutes, the representative checked with a security guard to confirm and then left.

26. In response to my initial inquiry about access to BEACON, Santisha told me that my account had already been unlocked. This came as a surprise to me, and I do not know why she thought that the account was unlocked. I explained that I had just tried it and it was still locked, and Santisha eventually said that she would unlock it that morning. She gave me a new username and password to try.

27. I also explained to Santisha that I was told by other MDL agents that my application had been "in adjudication" since February, and that I still had not received any eligibility determination or benefits. I asked if I could speak directly to the adjudicators – i.e. the people who were sitting behind an "adjudication" sign in the same office where Santisha and I were meeting. Santisha said that I could not speak with the adjudicators because "that's not how we do

it” and that I had to wait for them to call me. She advised me to watch out for their call and warned that if I did not pick up right away “I don’t know how long it’ll be until they can call you back.”

28. Santisha said that my only other option was to come back for another appointment. She said she could schedule another appointment for me within 48 “work hours” which she explained was somehow the equivalent of 6 days.

29. Although I briefly regained access to BEACON using my phone and my daughter’s computer in early November 2021, I discovered on the morning of November 15 that I was again completely locked out of the mobile version of the application and my log-in only worked sporadically on the web version of the platform. On the one occasion I was able to log into the web version of BEACON on the morning of November 15, it showed that my claim was “inactive.”

30. In addition, I have not received any unemployment benefits since losing my job in February 2021, and I have not even received any written determination of eligibility.

31. I have been looking actively for work – applying for case manager positions in hospitals, the housing authority, and other locations – but I have not yet found a job.

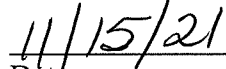
32. Because I do not have any income, I have applied for and begun receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP, food stamps) for my granddaughter, but I still have not been able to cover all of my living expenses. For example, I have been unable to provide sufficient food and access to needed veterinary care for my pets.

33. The lack of income has also caused me tremendous stress. I have started experiencing

panic attacks for the first time, and I have had to take medication for anxiety when I have never had to before. I also have had to take medication to be able to get rest at night. When I try to go to sleep, I've got so much on my mind, I really cannot fall asleep.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.


Deanne Gilliam


Date